

CHRIST'S MANIFESTATION TO MARY MAGDALENE

NO. 2733

A SERMON
INTENDED FOR READING ON LORD'S-DAY, JUNE 30, 1901
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AT NEW PARK STREET CHAPEL, SOUTHWARK
ON A LORD'S-DAY EVENING, IN THE SUMMER OF 1859

*“Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father;
but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father;
and to my God, and your God.”*
John 20:17

THIS was the first appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection. In sundry places and at divers times, during the ensuing forty days, He appeared to different disciples, showing Himself openly to them when they were assembled for worship and at other seasons. But this was the first occasion of His being seen by any of His followers after He had risen from the dead.

The whole incident is full of consolation and we, who are poor weary pilgrims through this earthly wilderness, need some words of comfort every now and then to cheer us on the road. May the Holy Spirit sweetly assist us in meditating now upon the things of Christ—and may our hearts burn within us as He speaks to us by the way!

I. First, IT IS PECULIARLY ENCOURAGING TO REMEMBER THAT THE FIRST PERSON TO WHOM OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST APPEARED AFTER HIS RESURRECTION WAS MARY MAGDALENE.

Mark expressly says, “Now when Jesus was risen early the first day of the week, he appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom he had cast seven devils.” Romanists will have it that Jesus Christ first of all appeared to the Virgin Mary, His mother, and they have invented some curious stories in order to give her this peculiar honor.

This shows that, in their opinion, there was a special favor conferred upon the person who first beheld the risen Savior—and I need not say that their assertion that it was the Virgin Mary is just another instance of their common practice of perverting the truth. Undoubtedly, Mary Magdalene was the first person who saw the Savior after His resurrection—at least, if the Roman guards saw Him when they shook and became as dead men through fear of the angel who rolled away the stone from the sepulchre, they were not Christ's disciples—so I mean that Mary Magdalene was the first of His faithful followers who had the honor of seeing Him after He rose from the dead.

It was a woman, then, who first beheld the risen Savior. It was a woman who was first in the transgression. It had, therefore, to be a woman who should first behold Jesus Christ when He rose from the grave. If there be—and there certainly is—some degree of opprobrium connected with womanhood, because Eve first of all touched the forbidden fruit, there is a far greater degree of glory now connected with it, because Mary Magdalene first of all beheld the Savior after His rising from the tomb.

Not only was it a woman to whom Christ first manifested Himself after His resurrection, but it was a woman out of whom He had cast seven devils. I am inclined to think that there were other devils in Mary Magdalene beside those that made her a demoniac. Luther used to say of her, “So many devils, so many sins.” She had been first a sinner, then she became a demoniac, and afterwards Christ changed her into a saint. How strange it was that Jesus should appear first to her! What, give the highest honor to her who had the most of sin! Sweet thought!

Then, if—

“I, the chief of sinners, am,”—

if I have an interest in the blood of Christ, there is no reason why I should not climb to the greatest heights of fellowship and enjoy the best of the good things which the Lord has prepared for them that love Him.

When Jesus takes a sinner to Himself, his pardon is so complete—so totally does God, for Christ's sake, overlook all previous sins—that, although he may not be as great a saint as the very chief of the apostles, who did most grievously rebel, so that he only obtained mercy because he did it ignorantly in unbelief, he may be the most highly-favored of the servants of the Lord and may have very special revelations made to him.

The experience of Mary Magdalene should be a great source of comfort to you who, after years of sin, have lately found the Savior. Think not that those years that you spent in folly, though they must always make you weep, will be the means of robbing you of fellowship with Him. Oh, no! He will restore to you the years that the locusts have eaten and He will not take away from you the pleasure of enjoying the bliss of God on earth—and certainly He will not diminish your glorious happiness when you shall stand before His throne above.

In thinking over this subject, I have come to the conclusion that Mary Magdalene was selected to see Christ first because she loved Him most. John loved Jesus much, but Mary loved Him more. John looked into the empty sepulchre and then went away home. But Mary stood there and wept until her risen Lord appeared to her.

Love, you know, is a keen-eyed grace. People usually say that love is blind. In one sense, the saying is true, but in another sense there never were such good eyes anywhere as those which love carries in her head. Love will look for Jesus and discover Him where none else can. If I set the unloving to read a chapter in the Bible, they will find no Savior there.

But if I ask the gracious Robert Hawker to read that same portion of Scripture, he finds in it the name of Jesus from beginning to end. If I beg one who is simply a critical scholar to study a Psalm, he sees no Messiah there—but if I set an enthusiastic lover of the Savior to read it, he sees Him, if not in every verse, still here and there he has glimpses of His glory.

If you want to see Jesus and to have sweet revelations of His glory, you must love Him. I must add to that remark, that you must weep for Him much, you must seek Him diligently, seek Him in the darkness and the twilight, seek Him when the sun has risen, seek Him at the sepulchre before the stone is rolled away—you must seek Him when you behold that the stone is gone, you must seek Him in the hollow tomb, you must seek Him in the garden, you must seek Him in life, you must seek Him in death, and then—the more diligent you are in seeking, the greater is the probability that Christ will manifest Himself to you and that you shall rejoice in finding Him.

Mary Magdalene was one of those who went forth bearing precious seed. She went forth weeping, but she returned to the disciples rejoicing, bringing her sheaves with her, for she had a joyous message for them. She had sown in tears when she went to seek her Lord, but she wept with joy when she found Him in the garden. Happy was that woman who found Jesus and who believed—truly she might rejoice in Him, for she was highly favored among women.

You see, then, that there is much sweetness, far more than I can tell you, in the thought that Mary Magdalene was the first person who was chosen to see the Lord Jesus Christ after His resurrection.

II. Secondly, we will notice SOME REASONS FOR THE PROHIBITION GIVEN IN THE TEXT.

Why was it that Jesus said to Mary, “Touch me not”? And why was it that He gave this very strange reason for the prohibition, “for I am not yet ascended to my Father”?

There seems to me to be great comfort in this message. I know it has comforted me, so I think I understand it aright. When Mary Magdalene had recognized her risen Redeemer and had called Him, “Rabboni, that is to say, Master,” her next impulse was to cast herself upon Him and embrace Him. But Jesus said to her, “No; embrace me not”—for that is the real meaning of the word—“I have something

for you to do for Me, so I cannot allow you to stop to manifest your affection. There will be plenty of time to do that another day. I want to send you to My disciples at once with a message—therefore, cling not to Me. The strengthening of my disciples is preferable even to the embracing of your Lord. Cling not to Me, for I am not yet ascended.”

It strikes me that Mary was half afraid that her Master would go away directly, and she thought, “That is my Master, for I know His voice, but I fear that He will vanish—the Spirit of God will take Him away.” She thought concerning Christ just as Obadiah did concerning Elijah. When Obadiah found the prophet, Elijah said to him, “Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.”

“And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hands of Ahab, to slay me? As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. And it shall come to pass, as soon as I am gone from thee, that the Spirit of the LORD shall carry thee whither I know not; and so when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find thee, he shall slay me.”

Obadiah expected that Elijah would be spirited away—and Mary thought the same concerning Christ. So she said to herself, “I will hold Him fast. This may be my only opportunity, so I will not let Him go.” But Jesus said, “I am not going away. I shall be here a little while longer, there will be time enough for embraces yet. The first thing I want you to do is to go to my disciples and tell them that I have risen from the grave, and that I am about to ascend to heaven.”

If you ask, “Why did Jesus speak thus to Mary Magdalene?” I think it is not difficult to explain the reason. Let me suppose that one of you has said, “I will have an hour for quiet meditation. I will cast myself upon my knees, I will open the Word of God—I will seek the Spirit to rest upon me and I will hope that I shall be able to see Jesus, and to clasp Him in my arms.”

Just as you have formed this resolve, a friend calls and says that he has an important engagement for you to fulfill. Perhaps he wants you to attend a prayer meeting, or to visit the sick, or to see some inquirer, or to do something for the Lord's cause, and you say, “There now, I expected to have had this evening for contemplation. Oh, I wish I had not so much to do with the church, for it robs me of my quiet hours! I love those sweet seasons of retirement when I can embrace the Savior and clasp Him to my heart. Why is it that I am to go out and feed the flock, and not find time for fellowship and communion so long and frequent as I desire?”

Whenever you feel inclined to talk like that, think that you hear your Master saying to you, “Embrace Me not. There will be time in heaven for that. Go you to my brethren and carry to them some words of consolation, for while it is sweet for you to embrace Me, it is sweeter to Me for you to go and embrace My poor brother and show him the way into My kingdom.”

God forbid that we should say one word against the high joys of contemplation! It is a blessed employment, but sometimes, work is better than worship—or rather, work is worship in its best form. Sometimes, it is a higher service to go to see the sick than to be at home on your knees. Sometimes, it is a more devout way of serving God to be busy for the church, even in what seems to be temporal matters, than to be seated at home, like Mary of old, at the feet of the Savior, listening to His words, but doing nothing for His cause.

I believe Martha is at times a great deal more than Mary. If Mary had always sat at the Savior's feet, she would have deserved no commendation. It was well that she sat there then, for it was a proper occasion, but if she had always sat there and left Martha to attend to the serving alone, then it would have been an abuse of her privileges.

There are times when the Master must say, “Embrace me not; but go to my brethren, and tell them that I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.”

III. Now, having noticed these two portions of our text, which I think are full of comfort—if not to you, they certainly have been to me—I will now endeavor to dilate upon THE MESSAGE OF OUR LORD TO MARY MAGDALENE.

Jesus said to her, "Go to my brethren." It is a remarkable fact that, *the higher Jesus Christ gets in glory, the more sweet are His expressions of love*. You know that, before His death, He said to His disciples, "Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you."

Yet now that He had risen from the dead, He called them by a still higher name. Possibly some of them thought, "If He should rise from the dead, He will be ashamed of us poor fishermen. He called us 'friends' when He was in His poverty—will He not return to that word 'servants' when He rises in majesty from the tomb?" No, when He had risen in dignity, it was just the reverse. The higher His dignity, the lower His condescension. "Go to my *brethren*."

There is another thing to be noted about that sweet word "brethren" as Christ then used it, for His disciples were never in a more sinful condition than they were at that time, or rather, they had never so grossly sinned as they had done a little before the Savior's resurrection. They were with Him every day—they were, all of them, in a measure faithful, and never forsook their Master, and never denied Him—till He came to die.

Yet, all the time they were true and faithful, He called them friends. You would have thought that, when three of them slept in the garden during His awful agony, when all forsook Him and fled, and when especially Peter denied Him, the Savior would have said, "I called you friends when you were faithful, I will now see whether I can stretch a point, even to call you servants."

But we see that the blacker was their sin, the stronger was His love—the more defiled they were, the more sweetly did He talk to them. He said to them, in deeds though not in words, "Henceforth, I call you not friends, for a mere friend is no relation, but I call you brethren, for My Father is your Father, and My God is your God."

Carry those two sweet thoughts away with you, for sweet indeed they will be to you if the Holy Spirit shall teach you the full meaning of them—that the higher the Savior gets, the more free is He in the expression of His love. And that other thought, that the farther the disciples ran away from their Master, the more lovingly did He call them back again.

This is marvelous and strange, but it is nevertheless true—who cannot derive comfort from such thoughts as these? I know, you feeble followers of Jesus, you have sometimes thought that He loved His people when He was on earth, but that now He reigns exalted on high, He has forgotten such of them as you are, but be you assured that, inasmuch as He has reached the summit of His glory, He does now manifest the summit of His love. The more He is exalted, the more does He manifest Himself.

Possibly, some of you are thinking that you have so greatly sinned that you cannot expect Him to love you. If so, you can appropriate this thought that *the sweetest promises in the Bible are for the very people who deserve them the least*. There are promises for those who follow close to their Savior, and very sweet ones, too, but some of the most tender promises in the Word of God are for those who have wandered furthest away from Him.

Take, for instance, this gracious message, "Return, thou backsliding Israel, saith the LORD; and I will not cause mine anger to fall upon you: for I am merciful, saith the LORD, and I will not keep anger for ever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the LORD thy God, and hast scattered thy ways to the strangers under every green tree, and ye have not obeyed my voice, saith the LORD. Turn, O backsliding children, saith the LORD; for I am married unto you: and I will take you one of a city, and two of a family, and I will bring you to Zion."

Blessed Jesus, when we should have thought that our sins would cause You to speak most harshly against us, we find that You have the softest words for those who have most erred—that our sins, which must make You angry—seem also to make You invite us back again with sweeter words than You use to those who have not grieved You as much as we have done.

Note again, *every time our Lord Jesus Christ says anything to His brethren, it is something that requires faith on their part*. Why did He not say, "Go and tell my brethren that I have risen from the

grave"? Because they did not need any faith for that. He had risen—that was a fact that they could discover by their eyesight—and some of them by their touch.

"No," says He, "I will make large drafts upon my people's faith. Go and tell them that I am about to ascend to my Father—that is something great for them to believe." Do you know, Christian friends, that the more you have of the manifest presence of Christ, the more faith you require? Have you not often asked to have a promise brought home to your heart by the special influences of the Spirit? Now, recollect, the more promises you have, the more faith you will require.

The words of Christ demand faith on our part. A manifestation from Christ is as truly a demand upon our faith as when He hides His face from us. When He hides His face, He requires us still to believe in Him even when He says nothing. But when He speaks, He requires us to believe something that He says. The more manifestations Christ grants to you, the more is your need of faith.

"I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." Luther was right when he said that all the pith of divinity lay in the pronouns. "'My Father and *your* Father.' He is 'My Father' by eternal generation. I was begotten of my Father before any of the worlds were made. He is 'your Father' by regeneration. He has begotten you again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead.

He is 'My Father,' as I am the Head of the church—I call Him Father in My Christhood, as God and man. And as I am your Representative, and you are all gathered up in Me, He is your Father, too—My Father, and your Father." How sweet is the word Father in such a connection. He is our Father because He has the deepest love to protect us—and if we doubt whether His power is equal to His love, let us notice what Jesus next says, "I ascend to my God, and your God." And inasmuch as God is omnipotent, and the Father is love, you have all the love you need and all the power equal to that love.

It seems sweet to hear Christ calling His Father His God. As He was a man, the Father was His God. As He was Christ, the God-man, the Father was God over Him, and speaking as a man, He could say, "My Father is greater than I." God the Father being greater than the Mediator, who said, in effect, "As man, I worship Him even as you worship Him. As man, I look up to Him as my Father the same as you do. He is My Father as He is your Father."

I have only to make one other remark, *how beautifully the Savior refers to the believer's union with Himself*. The whole Bible, when it is rightly understood, points to the believer's union with Christ and this sweet verse is full of that blessed truth. Christ and His people have united interests. When Christ calls God His Father, we may call God "our Father," too. In His inheritance we have a joint interest—He is Heir of all things, and we are joint-heirs with Him.

In relationship, Christ and His people are closely united. His brethren are our brethren—His Father is our Father. Even in service, as Christ was man, as He was the Servant of God for our sakes, so the Master whom He served is the Master whom we serve—and we together take the same service upon ourselves, believing that we together shall have the same kingdom conferred upon us and shall reign with Christ forever and ever.

An old divine calls Mary Magdalene *apostola apostolorum*, that is, the apostle to the apostles. An apostle is one who is sent—and Mary Magdalene was sent to those whom Christ afterwards sent to the ends of the earth. In like manner, a poor humble woman may be an apostle to one who shall afterwards be a great divine.

Let us hear, then, what this great apostle to the apostles has to say to us. She does not now tell us that Jesus Christ is about to ascend, she tells us that He has ascended, and whenever we draw around the table of our Lord, let us derive sweet influence from the fact that Jesus Christ has ascended. He ascended as a Conqueror, leading captivity captive. He ascended as a Forerunner for us, entering within the veil. He has ascended to make preparation for His people, according to His promise, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also."

He has ascended as our Intercessor—there He stands forever interceding before the throne of God for us, His children, His friends, His brethren. Oh, that we may now put our unfeigned and constant trust in Him who died, putting equal trust in Him who rose again, making this our glory, both in His dying and in His rising, that He has ascended up on high, and taken His lawful place at the right hand of God, where He also makes intercession for us!

Oh, that those who are dead in sin were quickened by God's Spirit that they might know something of the preciousness of having a Father in heaven, the same Father that Jesus Christ had! Sinner, I pray the Lord to teach you to believe in Jesus Christ. And if you have sinned with Mary Magdalene, may He help you to believe, with her, that you may share in her sweet manifestations and have a gracious message like hers to tell some day to the rest of your brethren!

EXPOSITIONS BY C. H. SPURGEON

ISAIAH 4 AND MATTHEW 16:21-23

Isaiah 40:1-2. *Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem.*

The loss of comfort is no small loss. God would have His people happy. They are in the best condition for serving Him and less likely to be overcome by the temptations of the world when the joy of the Lord is their strength. Therefore, three times over He bids His ministers comfort His people. O Triune JEHOVAH, help Your servant to now fulfill this commission!

2. And cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished,

After all, beloved, you have not to fight your own battles. Under one aspect, you may have to do so, but the great fight is already over—that fight which is so much greater than all others—that the lesser ones are scarcely worthy of the name of warfare. You have but to scatter the foes whom your great Captain has vanquished—and to march boldly onward because He has cleared the way before you.

2. That her iniquity is pardoned:

Oh, when that is the case, what does it matter about the warfare? Brethren, if you have a sense of sin forgiven, you may well bear the trials of the way. The sting is gone from death itself when sin is pardoned and therefore it is certainly gone from life as well

2. For she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.

If the Lord's ancient people could thus be comforted in their seasons of sorrow, how much more may we be cheered when we think of all the blessing which has come to us through the sorrows of our great covenant Head! All is settled now. "It is finished," was our Savior's cry from the cross. Our debts are all paid, so we may well be comforted.

3. The voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God.

You have not to turn the wilderness into a garden—you have only to make "a highway for our God." It is the presence of God that you want, O sorrowing soul, O mourning church! Let the Lord but come to you, and then all shall be well. Your business is to give heed to the cry, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make straight in the desert a highway for our God."

4. Every valley shall be exalted, and every mountain and hill shall be made low:

That is what must happen to you who are very great and highly exalted—you will have to be made low. But as for the lowly ones, they shall be exalted. It is in this way that God comes to His people, marching over hills that have been overthrown, and over valleys that have been filled up, and leveled to make a highway for the King.

4-5. And the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough places plain: and the glory of the LORD shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together: for the mouth of the LORD hath spoken it.

That is the great purpose and end of nature, of providence, and of grace—that the glory of the Lord may be revealed. It is already revealed—but many men do not see it. Yet it is God's purpose “that all flesh shall see it together.”

Do we all see it, dear friends? Are we not far too apt to take glory to ourselves—and to make out that we are strong, that we are wise? Ah! too often that is the case, so it is the Lord's work to put an end to all that folly, so that nothing shall remain but the glory of the Lord, that all flesh may see it, and see nothing else.

6-8. *The voice said, Cry. And he said, What shall I cry? All flesh is grass, and all the goodliness thereof is as the flower of the field: the grass withereth, the flower fadeth: because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: surely the people is grass. The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.*

So, you see, there is a withering work to be done by the Spirit of God—withering up all the glory of the flesh to the intent and purpose that the glory of God's Word may be revealed and that JEHOVAH Himself may be seen in His majesty and might. This is the great battle of all the ages.

Sometimes men have set up a golden calf to be worshipped. At other times, blocks of wood and stone. But idolatry is universal wherever man is found. We are all far too prone to trust in something else instead of in God—and God is always jealous of these rivals of His—these Dragons that dare impiously to stand in the presence of the ark of the Lord.

9. *O Zion, that bringest good tidings, get thee up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, that bringest good tidings, lift up thy voice with strength; lift it up, be not afraid; say unto the cities of Judah, Behold your God!*

That is the point which we need to reach, where we may see God—where we may be conscious of His presence—where we may trust in His grace—where we may lean on His arm. And oh! we need to have the voice very much lifted up before we can hear this cry, “Behold your God!” We run after this sight, and that, and the other, and forget Him who alone is worth seeing.

“Behold your God,” you who are sorrowing, you who are perplexed, you who are sorely burdened, Behold your God, and you shall be strengthened and comforted.

10-11. *Behold, the Lord GOD will come with strong hand, and his arm shall rule for him: behold, his reward is with him, and his work before him. He shall feed his flock like a shepherd: he shall gather the lambs with his arm, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young.*

This is what the Good Shepherd is constantly doing. Nobody else can do it. He alone can protect the weak, who are His lambs, and succor those whose inward sorrows bring them into deep distress. And there is nothing which He cannot do, for He is omnipotent. Then why do you not trust Him?

You remember what the Lord Himself says, by the mouth of Jeremiah—“Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm, and whose heart departeth from the LORD. For he shall be like the heath in the desert, and shall not see when good cometh; but shall inhabit the parched places in the wilderness, in a salt land and not inhabited. Blessed is the man that trusteth in the LORD, and whose hope the LORD is. For he shall be as a tree planted by the waters, and that spreadeth out her roots by the river, and shall not see when heat cometh, but her leaf shall be green: and shall not be careful in the year of drought, neither shall cease from yielding fruit.”

Now comes a verse by which we are taught the greatness of God—

12. *Who hath measured the waters in the hollow of his hand, and meted out heaven with the span, and comprehended the dust of the earth in a measure, and weighed the mountains in scales, and the hills in a balance?*

Who has done all this but God? Then, after that, is there anything too hard for Him to do? And who is so worthy of your confidence as this Omnipotent One? Oh, let the thunder of His power make you ashamed of the weakness of your unbelief!

13-14. *Who hath directed the Spirit of the LORD, or being his counsellor hath taught him? With whom took he counsel, and who instructed him, and taught him in the path of judgment, and taught him knowledge, and shewed to him the way of understanding?*

Do you want greater wisdom than His? Are you perplexed because you cannot understand all mysteries? What would your wisdom and understanding be if they were placed side by side with His? A single drop of water, compared with all seas and oceans, has a larger magnitude than all your powers have compared with the greatness of your God and all His glorious attributes. Trust Him, then, and let Him lead you whithersoever He wills.

15. *Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket,*

All the nations—Jews and Gentiles, the vast multitudes of China, and India, and all other nations—all these are but as a drop of a bucket—the one drop that trembles on the bucket's brim when all the rest of the water is gone.

15. *And are counted as the small dust of the balance:*

That little imperceptible dust that does not turn the scale of an ordinary balance and for which you would need the most sensitive scales in order to discover its presence. That is all that the whole of the nations of the earth are in comparison with God. Yet, sometimes we fancy that one man is so great that all must give way to him. Whereas, if we trust in God, and think as God thinks, a whole nation will be to us as a drop of a bucket or as the unseen dust of the balance. Well did Dr. Watts sing:—

*“Great God! How infinite art Thou!
What worthless worms are we!
Let the whole race of creatures bow,
And pay their praise to Thee.*

*“Thy throne eternal ages stood,
Ere seas or stars were made;
You art the ever-living God,
Were all the nations dead.”*

15-16. *Behold, he taketh up the isles as a very little thing. And Lebanon is not sufficient to burn, nor the beasts thereof sufficient for a burnt offering.*

There, set Libanus itself on fire—let all its forests of cedar be the wood to burn the sacrifice, and all its cattle the victims upon the altar—yet are they but as a child's toy in the sight of the all-glorious JEHOVAH. There is nothing in them that can satisfy His infinite heart.

17-18. *All nations before him are as nothing; and they are counted to him less than nothing, and vanity. To whom then will ye liken God? or what likeness will ye compare unto him?*

Now, children of God, do not miss the meaning of this passage by saying that it relates to the heathen. True, it does, but not to them alone. When the heathen liken God to sticks and stones, they scarcely act worse than some of His people do, for, sometimes, we do not even think as well of our God as we do of ourselves.

You, being evil, are constantly supplying your children's needs, yet you doubt whether God will supply yours. You liken Him to an ungenerous father, or to a forgetful and faithless friend, one who changes with the wind. Oh, dear friends, have you not so likened Him? If so, let the rebuke to the heathen be also a rebuke to you.

This is what the heathen do—

19-20. *The workman melteth a graven image, and the goldsmith spreadeth it over with gold, and casteth silver chains. He that is so impoverished that he hath no oblation—*

No precious metal,—

20-26. *Chooseth a tree that will not rot; he seeketh unto him a cunning workman to prepare a graven image, that shall not be moved. Have ye not known? have ye not heard? hath it not been told you from the beginning? have ye not understood from the foundations of the earth? It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in: that bringeth the princes to nothing; he maketh the judges of the earth as vanity. Yea, they shall not be planted; yea, they shall not be sown: yea, their stock shall not take root in the earth: and he shall also blow upon them, and they shall wither, and the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble. To whom then will ye liken me, or shall I be equal? saith the Holy One. Lift up your eyes on high,*

Look at the stars,—

26-27. *And behold who hath created these things, that bringeth out their host by number: he calleth them all by names by the greatness of his might, for that he is strong in power; not one faileth. Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God?*

You see, it is another form of that same sin of forgetting God or thinking little of God. It does not matter much whether it takes the form of atheism or of idolatry, it is the same kind of evil—it is getting away from God, or neglecting Him and in our case, when we get depressed in spirit and fancy that God forgets us, it is the same sinful nature working in the same sinful manner. May God help us to forsake every form of evil!

28-29. *Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of his understanding. He giveth power to the faint;*

Come now, faint heart, and swoon away at His feet. Come to Him in all your weakness. Do not try to conceal it, but trust Him to remove it. “He giveth power to the faint;”

29. *And to them that have no might he increaseth strength.*

What a mercy it is to have no might that God may increase our strength! What a curse it is to be so strong in yourself that you do not go to the Strong for strength!

30. *Even the youths—*

With all their vigor. “Even the youths”—

30. *Shall faint and be weary, and the young men—*

Though more confirmed in strength, “The young men”—

30-31. *Shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles;*

That is their first mode of progression, in which, perhaps, there is more flight than is good for them. “They shall mount up with wings as eagles;”

31. *They shall run, and not be weary:*

That is an improvement upon the flying, but they shall still further improve their pace, for running is not the best pace at which a man can go. Enoch did not run with God, but he walked with Him. And so, as we grow in grace, we shall advance, from flying to running, and from running to walking. This is the wise, sober, steady mode of going to heaven.

31. *And they shall walk, and not faint.*

The Lord help us to attain to that blessed rate of progression, in which we shall “walk, and not faint,” for His dear Son’s sake!

Matthew 16:21. *From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto his disciples, how that he must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.*

He had previously spoken somewhat darkly concerning His death, but it was so sad and so strange a revelation to His disciples that they could not think He really meant quite what He said. But now He

began definitely and plainly to tell them about the future, and even to enter into details concerning His death and resurrection. He knew all that the work of redemption would involve for Him. He had counted the cost, but—

*“When the Savior knew
The price of pardon was His blood,
His pity ne’er withdrew.”*

It must have been very saddening, but at the same time, very profitable to the minds of the apostles to be led by their Lord in this direction.

22. Then Peter took him, and began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall not be unto thee.

The margin reads, “Pity thyself, Lord,” as though Peter meant to say, “God grant, of His infinite mercy, that this may not be true! How can it be that such a one as You are should die?” He probably thought that Christ’s death would be the end of His kingdom, the ruin of all His people’s hopes, the quenching of the light of Israel. So, in his zeal for his Master’s cause, he cried, “This shall not be unto thee.”

23. But he turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.

Notice the contrast between the 18th verse and the 23rd. In the 18th verse, Christ had said, “Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church.” And here He is saying, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” I do not understand our Lord to have called Peter Satan, but to have looked right through Peter and to have seen Satan standing behind him, and making use of the apostle to be his spokesman.

The best of men may sometimes serve the devil’s turn better than a bad man would. He may speak, through those who love the Lord, words which are clean contrary to the mind of Christ. So Christ sees Satan lurking, as in an entrenchment, behind Peter, and He says, “Get thee behind me: thou art an offense unto me.”

The idea of pitying Himself—the thought of shirking the task upon which He had entered—was offensive to Him. There was a savor about it of the things of men—of self and of self-saving, instead of self-denial and generous, unselfish, Godlike self-sacrifice. Oh, that we would always speak as Christ did on this occasion—whenever anything is proposed to us by which we would avoid the cross that He intends us to carry!

When anyone wants us to moderate our zeal, or to tone down our opinions, lest we should have to suffer for our faithfulness, let us reply, “Get thee behind me, Satan.” What has a soldier of the cross to do with avoiding the battle with evil? He should be ever ready for the good fight of faith. What has an heir of heaven to do with the saving of himself? Let him say with the apostle Paul, “I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord.”

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.